

EUROPE-BASHING IN U.S. DOMESTIC POLITICS

The next president of the United States will inherit some difficult puzzles that spell trouble with the European allies.

BY GREGORY F. TREVERTON

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE United States and its European allies are serious but not bad, as Ernest Hemingway, who was fond of Spanish *doble dichos*, or reversible double-sayings, might have put it. On the surface, the next president will inherit smooth relations, ones symbolized by the Toronto summit, Mr. Reagan's valedictory. Yet beneath the surface and beyond the first few months, the new president will inherit several puzzles that bear directly on the long-term shape of the trans-Atlantic alliance.

One issue has been surprisingly absent from the early campaigning – burden-sharing, that hardy perennial. Yet for either George Bush or Michael Dukakis as president, the task will be managing the American politics of the issue. Members of Congress have thrust forward a number of calls in recent years for Europe to do more in its own defence; they have accompanied those calls by more or less disguised coercion. There is nothing new about all this: Congressional exhortations to the Europeans to pull up their socks go back at least to the initiatives associated with Senator Mike Mansfield in the last 1960s. If anything is different now, it is who does the exhorting. In the 1960s, pressure on the Europeans came mostly from the political left, people who thought that the US had too many commitments in too many places or that 300,000 American troops in Europe were even then an anachronism. Now, however, the pressure is spread across the political spectrum but is most powerful on the political right.

In particular, it is now in fashion to argue that given its twin budget and trade deficits and its lagging productivity, the United States can no longer afford its global commitments. Paul Kennedy is the name most associated with that view, and David Calleo applies it specifically to the Atlantic Alliance. This "we-can't-afford-it" view is economic nonsense, for with decent economic management there is no reason why the United States cannot afford to spend six percent of its gross national product on defence and increase living standards at the same time; after all, historically six is not a high number for the United States. It is about what the country spends on education and two-thirds what it lays out for health care. Moreover, during the period 1980 to 1986, while defence was growing as a share of GNP, from 5.2 to 6.6 percent, real per capita consumption rose by 15 percent.

In any event, now as in the past, the real debate is about how many troops the United States has, not where they are located. Analytically, American forces are not much more expensive to maintain in Europe. They certainly would be more expensive to move, for new facilities in the US would have to be prepared for them. So there is money to be saved by withdrawing troops from Europe only if those forces are then demobilized – removed from the force structure.

Yet that analysis does not drive the politics of the issue, nor has it in the past. The latest procurement scandal notwithstanding,

weapons get built in some Congress members' districts. So, too, bases provide jobs where they are located. By contrast, there is little constituency for troops stationed abroad; the soldiers can vote, but most would not vote to remain abroad. And so those troops are a tempting target of budget cutters, never mind the economic facts. One question for the new administration, will be how much it feels that specific pressure, especially from Congress.

IF THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE EUROPE-bashing so far, that would be little consolation if America's commitment to Europe were tugged down in general defence budget-cutting. So a second question is, economics aside, how much political heat will the next administration feel to cut Pentagon spending. Defence spending has been declining at two to three percent a year in real terms, so a baseline guess would be a continuation of that trend. Cuts of that order would constrain modernization and, if history is any guide, diminish readiness but would not require cuts in European forces.

Before the end of a first Bush or Dukakis Administration, based on historical patterns, defence spending will turn upward again, in response to some specific event or to the broad feeling in the body politic that the US is letting down its guard. Hopes for arms control, abetted by the "Gorbie factor," may upset that historical pattern, but history also suggests a paradoxical conclusion of a partisan sort: defence spending may be lower in a Bush administration

than in one led by Mr. Dukakis. Dukakis will be vulnerable to charges of softness, especially if he pursues far-reaching strategic arms control and carries out his declared intentions to cancel major nuclear programs, and so he will need to prove that he is serious about defence.

A third question is whether the defence burden will become intertwined with economic dealings across the Atlantic. In his ill-fated 1973 "Year of Europe" speech, Henry Kissinger asserted that "political, military and economic issues in Atlantic relations are linked by reality, not by our choice nor for the tactical purpose of trading one off against the other." At the time, Europeans feared he meant just the opposite of what he said: that Washington was going to use its leverage in the security domain to extract economic concessions from its partners.

So far, interestingly, it mostly has not happened. Economics and defence have been dealt with among the allies along separate tracks dominated by separate sets of experts. On balance, the separation has served the alliance well. The allies have argued about security or economics but mostly on their separate merits. Both the issues and their domestic politics have been more manageable than if explicit linkages had been drawn. In the process, Europeans have come to take the tacit link to American forces in Europe half seriously: normally it seems an intramural drama played out between the US Executive and Congress, while on occasion it has moved them to increase their own defence effort, at least symbolically.